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A. Wigfall Green

*University of Mississippi*

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# Meter and Rhyme in Chaucer's "Anelida and Arcite"

A. Wigfall Green

"Anelida and Arcite" may have been written from ten to twenty years before "Sir Thopas," probably Chaucer's greatest achievement in virtuosity of vocabulary, meter, and rhyme. Even though the material is tragic in essence, "Anelida and Arcite" becomes something of a mock-heroic poem, largely because Chaucer cannot repress the humor that wells up in him: the setting, Mt. Haemus in Thrace, becomes "the frosty contre called Trace"; Chaucer's address in the twenty-ninth stanza to "ye thrifty wymmen alle" to take example of Anelida, who "was so meke" that Arcite "loved her lyte"; Anelida's heart in stanza 31 "blak of hewe"; and Anelida's swooning in the last stanza, 45, with "face ded, betwixe pale and grene," are incongruities of which Chaucer, perhaps more than any other poet, would have awareness.

In meter and rhyme, Chaucer is quite as versatile in "Anelida and Arcite" as in "Sir Thopas." The poem as a whole is well designed: stanzas 1-3 are the "Invocation"; 4-30 "The Story"; 31 the "Proem" to "The Complaynt of Anelida"; 32-37 the "Strophe" of "The Complaynt"; 38-43 the "Antistrophe" of "The Complaynt"; 44 the "Conclusion" of "The Complaynt"; and 45 "The Story Continued."<sup>1</sup> The story was not completed. The following forms are used in the various stanzas:

<i>Stanza(s)</i>	<i>Rhyme</i>	<i>Number of Verses in Each Stanza</i>	<i>Number of Feet (All Iambic)</i>
1-30	ababbcc (rhyme royal)	7	5
31-35	aab/aab/bab	9	5
36	aaab/aaab/bbba/bbba	16	4445/4445/ 4445/4445

In the first eight verses, the *a* rhymes have four feet, the *b* rhymes five; in the last eight verses, the *b* rhymes have four feet, the *a* rhymes five. Brink<sup>2</sup> calls this a metabolic stanza, "constructed on the principle of the tail-rime (*rime-couee*).<sup>3</sup>" This stanza, the fifth of the strophe, should be compared to 42, the fifth stanza of the antistrophe.

37	aab/aab/bab	9	5
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Although like 31-35, this stanza, as has been pointed out by Robinson,<sup>3</sup> French,<sup>4</sup> and earlier Chaucerians, contains internal rhyme. Each verse has at least two internal rhymes, usually with a short pause after each rhyme; after the second pause, there are either one or two words, the last of which creates the end-rhyme, often a booming end-rhyme. The first four verses are typical:

My swete foo, why do ye so, for shame?  
 And thenke ye that furthered be your name  
 To love a newe, and ben untrewe? Nay!  
 And putte yow in sclaunder now and blame, . . .

The internal *newe-untrewe* rhymes with the *trew* end-rhymes of stanzas 15, 21, 31, and 38. Echo, repetition, and rhyme are frequent: note *ye* in the first and second verses and *Nay* in the third, as well as *be* and *ben* in the second and third. Another verse,

Yet come ayein, and yet be pleyn som day,

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is a good example of repetition and rhyme. In the same stanza, but out of the regular rhyme scheme, *yow* and *now* are repeated and create rhyme with *yow* and *now* of the fourth verse.

Stanza 43 is of similar construction.

38-39

Like 31-35

40

aaaaaaaa

9

5

It should be noted that 40, the third stanza of the antistrophe, has a rhyme scheme different from that of 34, the third stanza of the strophe.

41

Like 31-35 and 38-39

42

Like 36

43

aab/aab/bab

9

5

Like 31-35, 38-39, and 41, stanzas 37 and 43 have the rhyme scheme aab/aab/bab; but 37 and 43 differ in that they contain internal rhyme. Such rhyme and alliteration and repetition, which also give power to this stanza, are noted by underscoring:

The longe nyght this wonder sight I drye,  
 And on the day for thilke afray I dye,  
 And of all this ryght noght, iwis, ye reche.  
Ne nevere mo myn yen two be drie,  
 And to your routhe, and to your trouthe, I crie.  
 But welaway! to fer be they to feche;  
 Thus holdeth me my destinee a wreche.  
 But me to rede out of this drede, or guye,  
Ne may my wit, so weyk is hit, not streche.

*Nyght*, 1, and *ryght*, 3, rhyme, as do *day*, 2; *ye*, 3; *be*, 4 and 6; *they*, 6; *me*, 7 and 8; and *may*, 9. The combination of repetition and rhyme in *to your routhe* and *to your trouthe* in 5 is quite effective, as is the assonance created in *I* in 1, 2, and 5, followed by *drye*, *dye*, and *crie*, the last word in each of those verses.

44 Like 31-35, 38-39, and 41

45 Like 1-30

The forty-five stanzas in "Anelida and Arcite" contain the following rhymes:

<i>Stanza</i>	<i>Rhyme</i>	<i>Other Stanza(s) and Rhyme</i>
1	<i>rede-drede</i>	40 <i>womanhede-dede-nede-lede-drede-bede-mede-sede-hede</i>
	<i>Trace-place-grace</i>	6 <i>face-grace</i>
	<i>guye-crye</i>	10 <i>espye-tyrannye</i> ; 18 <i>flaterie-jelousye</i> ; 22 <i>bigamy-lye</i> ; 23 <i>traitorie-trecherie-espie</i> ;
		43 <i>drye-dye-drie-crie-guye</i>
2	<i>Arcite-bite</i>	7 <i>write-Arcite</i> ; 16 <i>lyte-Arcite-wite</i> ; 25 <i>lyte-Arcite</i> ; 29 <i>Arcite-lyte-delyte</i> ; 30 <i>write-Arcite</i> ; 36 <i>respite-quyte-Arcite-write-delyte-wite-myte-byte</i>
	<i>storie-memorie</i>	5 <i>victorie-glorie</i>
3	<i>glade-shade-fade</i>	6 <i>hadde-ladde-spradda</i> (proximate)
	<i>wynne-Corynne</i>	15 <i>wynne-twynne-synne</i>
4	<i>wente-entente</i>	19 <i>entente-wente</i> ; 23 <i>mente-wente</i>
6	<i>quene-shene</i>	11 <i>quene-shene</i> ; 20 <i>quene-tene</i> ; 21 <i>grene-quene</i> ; 24 <i>quene-tene</i> ; 26 <i>sustene-tene-grene</i> ; 45 <i>quene-grene</i>
7	<i>thus-Theseus</i>	9 <i>Tydeus-Campaneus</i>
	<i>yevynge-rydinge-bringe</i>	11 <i>dwellynge-springe-likynge</i> ; 27 <i>lyvynge-singe</i> ; 30 <i>langwisshinge-wepinge-compleynynge</i>
8	<i>fulfille-kille-stille</i>	28 <i>fille-wille</i>
9	<i>also-two-ago</i>	14 <i>so-a-two</i>
12	<i>fairenesse-stidfast</i>	15 <i>besynesse-distresse</i> ; 21 <i>newfangle</i>

- |    |                                                                  |                                                                                                                                    |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | <i>nesse-Lucresse</i>                                            | <i>nesse-stidfastnesse; 35 gentillesse-humblesse-besynesse-maistresse-hevy-nesse; 39 unkyndenesse-gladness-hevy-nesse-witnesse</i> |
| 13 | <i>seyn-pleyn</i>                                                | 30 <i>ageyn-geyn; 41 ageyn-reyn-sovereyn-slayn-feyn</i>                                                                            |
|    | <i>knyght-wyght-bryght</i>                                       | 17 <i>wyght-myght-knyght; 32 wight-myght-knyght-ryght-plyght</i>                                                                   |
|    | <i>assure-creature</i>                                           | 42 <i>aventure-creature-discomfiture-endure-figure-asure-asure</i>                                                                 |
| 14 | <i>throwe-loweyknowe</i>                                         | 28 <i>knowe-lowe</i>                                                                                                               |
|    | <i>chere-lerere</i>                                              | 16 <i>manere-chere; 18 here-swere; 35 manere-here-chere-dere; 45 chere-here</i>                                                    |
| 15 | <i>rewe-trewe</i>                                                | 21 <i>trewe-newe-hewe; 31 hewe-trewe-rewe-newe;</i>                                                                                |
|    |                                                                  | 38 <i>trewe-newe-rewe-hewe</i>                                                                                                     |
| 20 | <i>thoght-broght</i>                                             | 39 <i>soght-thoght-noght-oght-broght</i>                                                                                           |
| 22 | <i>noon-agoon</i>                                                | 24 <i>ston-agon-noon</i>                                                                                                           |
| 23 | <i>feyne-pleyne</i>                                              | 33 <i>deyne-peyne-restreynne-pleyne; 38 seyne-pleyne-cheyne-tweyne-peyne</i>                                                       |
| 31 | <i>remembraunce-plesaunce-daunce-countenaunce - ob-servaunce</i> | 44 <i>balaunce-penaunce-chaunce-remembraunce</i>                                                                                   |

The first verse of this stanza, which is the proem to "The Complaynt of Anelida,"

So thirleth with the poynt of remembraunce  
closely parallels the last verse of stanza 44, which is the  
conclusion,

Hath thirled with the poynt of remembraunce.

- |    |                                 |                                        |
|----|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 34 | <i>more-yore-lore-ev-ermore</i> | 44 <i>more-evermore-lore-yore-sore</i> |
|----|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------|

The rhymes are appropriate when serious, and delightful when humorous: Anelida, in 11 and 45, is the *quene-shene*; Arcite causes *tene* in 20, 24, and 26. Anelida, in 12, has *fairenesse* and, in her *stidfastnesse*, 21, is like *Lucesse* in 12. Having become *maistresse* of Arcite, who no longer has *gentillesse* and *humblesse* because of his *besynesse* elsewhere, she can have only *hevynesse* in 35. She must, in 39, flee from *gladnesse* to *hevynesse* without *witnesse* because of his *unkyndenesse*. In stanza 1 the author says that he must *crye* to Mars to *guye* him; in 43, Anelida makes her *crie* to Arcite because her wit cannot *guye* her, and the sorrow she must *drye* causes her to *crie* so that her eyes will not be *drie*, and she must *dye*. The *tyrannye* of Creon in 10 leads naturally to the *flaterie* and *jelousye* of Arcite in 18, to the *bigamy* of 22, and to *traitorie* and *trecherie* in 23.

There is occasional rhyme of proper names within themselves: *Theseus* in 7 and *Tydeus-Campaneus* in 9; sometimes a proper noun, like *Arcite* in 2, appears to establish the rhyme for common nouns.

The rhyme of one stanza sometimes is merely repeated in another: *quene-shene* in 6 and 11. At other times it is repeated with increment: *wyght-mygght-knyght* of 17 becomes *wight-mygght-knyght-ryght-plyght* of 32; and occasionally, as in 36, there seems to be an attempt to repeat all previously used rhymes: *Arcite-write-delyte-wite-byte*.

Sometimes the spelling determines the rhyme: *seyn-pleyn* in stanza 13, with additional rhyme in 30 and 41, do not rhyme with *pleyne* in 23 or with similar rhymes in 33 and 38; nor do *upbreyde-obeyde* of 17 rhyme with *seyd-apaide-breyd* of 18.

Although two final syllables are spelled identically, if there is no correspondence of accented vowel sound there is no rhyme: *throwe-lowe-yknowe* of 14 and *knowe-lowe* of 28 do not rhyme with *narowe-arowe* of 27.

Stanza 40 is something of a proving-ground for rhyme: although the material is basically serious, the multiplicity of rhyme makes the entire stanza comic: *womandede-dede-nede-lede-drede-bede-mede-sede-hede*.

In addition to links in language between the various stanzas, there are sometimes links between the first and last verses of a stanza, as in 18:

And eke he made him *jelous* over here,  
 .....

Withoute love, he feyned *jelousye*.

Sometimes the repetitions approximate refrain. *Anelida* and *Arcite* are contrasted in the following stanzas, as are *false* and *fair*:

7 Of quene Anelida and fals Arcite.

20 Thus lyveth feire Anelida the quene  
 For fals Arcite, that dide her al this tene.

21 This fals Arcite, of his newfanglenesse,  
 .....

And falsed fair Anelida the quene.

23 This fals Arcite, sumwhat moste he feyne

24 That suffreth fair Anelida the quene.

"Anelida and Arcite" is not the most attractive of Chaucer's works, but it is an important experiment in language, meter, and rhyme.

To recapitulate, the narrative of the poem, comprising stanzas 1-30 and 45, is written in rhyme royal, ababbcc. Stanza 31, the proem to "The compleynt of Anelida," is like stanzas 32-35, 37-39, 41, and 43-44 in that the stanza of nine verses is used, containing only two rhymes, aab/aab/bab. After the proem, the next six stanzas comprise a strophe, stanzas 32-37; the strophe is followed by an antistrophe, consisting also of six stanzas, 38-43. To give symmetry to "The compleynt," the antistrophe is followed by a conclusion, stanza 44, which counterbalances the proem.<sup>5</sup> The master architect of poetry has also given balance to strophe and antistrophe in designing sixteen verses for the fifth stanza of the strophe and the fifth stanza of the antistrophe, each stanza, however, containing only two rhymes, like the remainder of the stanzas of "The compleynt." Each of these stanzas, 36 and 42, is arranged in units of four, aaab/aaab/bbba/bbba, the second half being tied to the first half by the *b* rhyme. To vary



his general pattern, Chaucer placed an extra foot in every fourth verse; thus the twelve verses of lyrical lament are exalted to the heroic level by the introduction of four verses of five feet each. One might expect a similar rhyme scheme in the third stanza of the strophe and the third stanza of the antistrophe, stanzas 34 and 40. Stanza 34, however, has the usual arrangement and the rhyme scheme of the majority of stanzas in "The compleynt," aab/aab/bab, in which the *b* rhymes of the third tercet neatly link themselves with the *b* rhymes of the first two tercets. These stanzas, then, unlike stanzas 36 and 42 which are arranged in units of four, are arranged in units of three. But Chaucer provides a welcome asymmetry in stanza 40 in making it rhyme aaaaaaaa, thus establishing himself as a poetic virtuoso. But, as if to demonstrate that the highest art has not only a pattern but variety within that pattern, he introduced internal rhyme into the sixth and last stanza of the strophe and of the antistrophe, as previously indicated. The conclusion of "The compleynt," stanza 44, is in the same metrical form as the proem, stanza 31. The last stanza of the poem, 45, in which Chaucer resumed the narrative, is in the same metrical form as the first stanza of the poem. Thus Chaucer has rounded out not only "The compleynt" but also the poem as a whole even though the poem was not completed.

In his use of balance, antithesis, repetition, and alliteration, Chaucer is at his best in "The compleynt." Here also, as in "My swete foo" of 37, he uses oxymoron, later so precious to the poet of the Renaissance. In the first stanza of the strophe, 32, five of the nine verses begin with *And*, the type of polysyndeton which Shakespeare developed to the ultimate in sonnet 66, in which ten of the fourteen verses begin with the same conjunction.

Throughout the poem Chaucer ingeniously links stanza with stanza: "fals Arcite" in the last verse of stanza 20 prepares for "This fals Arcite," the first three words of 21, in which *falsed* is used in the last verse; *fals* appears twice in 22; the opening of 23 is identical to the opening of 21, "This fals Arcite," and is followed by *fals* and *falsnes*;

this group of five stanzas, 20-24, is brought to near perfection, but with a change in mood, by closing 20 with the couplet:

Thus lyveth feire Anelida the quene  
For fals Arcite, that dide her al this tene.

and 24 with the couplet:

That suffreth fair Anelida the quene  
For fals Arcite, that dide her al this tene.

Various stanzas, as previously suggested, have also been skillfully interwoven by rhyme. The first two rhyming words of stanza 1, *rede-drede*, provide rhyme for the nine rhymes of stanza 40; the concluding couplet of stanza 1, rhyming *guye-crye*, creates a bond with 43 in which the rhyme is inverted to *crie-guye*; the four rhyming words of 34 reappear in four of the five rhyming words of 44; the first rhyme of stanza 6, *quene-shene*, becomes the first rhyme in stanza 11 and rhymes with *quene-grene* of 45, the last stanza.

In "Anelida and Arcite" there are five distinct types of stanza. There is merit, therefore, in the statement of Lounsbury<sup>6</sup> that the poem contains "unusual metrical forms" and "daring experiments in versification." In skill of versification, poetry has not excelled that of stanzas 36, 37, 40, 42, and 43.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>*The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (2d ed.; Oxford, 1899), I, 529. The arrangement of Skeat has been followed by most later scholars.

<sup>2</sup>Bernhard ten Brink, *The Language and Metre of Chaucer Set Forth*, 2d ed., rev. Friedrich Kluge; trans. M. Bantinck Smith (London, 1901), p. 257.

<sup>3</sup>*The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson (2d ed.; Boston, 1957), p. 790; quotations from the poem have been taken from this edition.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Dudley French, *A Chaucer Handbook* (New York, 1929), p. 101.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Frederick J. Furnivall, *A Parallel-Text Edition of Chaucer's Minor Poems*, Chaucer Soc., 1st Ser., No. 57-58, Pt. II (London, n.d.), p. 145.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas R. Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer* (New York, 1892), III, 309.